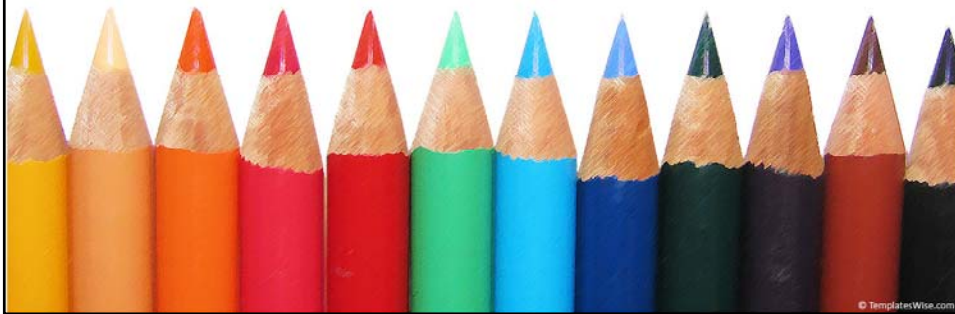


How Family Friendly Is Your School?

Montana PIRC



Goals:

- Understand the importance of welcoming families into partnership with schools and community.
- Learn how to use concrete tools for assessing how Family Friendly your school is.
- Provide a framework for beginning a conversation about how to engage families at your school site.



Research Brief: **All Families Can Help at Home**

Monitoring how children use their time, engaging in home-learning activities, and expressing high expectations for their children have a greater effect on student achievement than does family income or structure.

Reginald Clark's studies of what families do at home, across all backgrounds, have found that many high-achieving children live in single-parent households where the mother does not have a college education.



Possible Discussion Questions

1. How might we use this information?
2. Who else needs to be aware of this information?
3. What does this make you curious about?



Montana's Graduation Gap

All Students—76%

White—80%

Native American—48%

Dropouts from the class of 2008 will cost Montana almost \$830 million in lost wages over their lifetimes.

Alliance For Excellent Education



Where is our students' safety net?

How can we ensure all students get the support they need at home and in school?

How can we build strong networks of support cradle to career?



Studies show that meaningful Family Engagement in Early Childhood Education has a big impact.

For example, family engagement at the Chicago Parent-Child Center* program was associated with:

- greater parent involvement in the elementary school years;
- greater parental satisfaction with children's schooling;
- higher expectations for children's educational attainment;
- positive youth outcomes in high school.

*The Parent-Child Center is a program of Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

Thus, early positive patterns in a home-school relationship bridge children's experiences over time and across educational settings...

(HFRP; "Supporting Home-School Relationships Over Time", *Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education*, No. 1, Spring 2006)



Research shows...

...that children whose parents are consistently involved in their education are shown to **achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic background, or the parents' education level. *Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.***

(EPIC for Children)



MetLife Survey

Surveys of new teachers find that “the biggest challenge they face as a teacher is communicating with and involving parents,” and that they felt “least prepared to engage families in supporting their children’s education.”



2007 NCNASL Study

The factor most correlated with higher achievement was the school’s effort to engage parents, families and communities in the school, outweighing even school leadership, teacher quality and curriculum.



2007 NCNASL Study

One possible explanation for the Montana finding could be that, in areas where communities and families are not convinced of schools' value and purpose, children are unlikely to view school as important.

Working together, schools and communities can learn from each other.



Herbert Walbert

- Students spend just 13% of their waking hours in class.
- The rest, 87%, is spent out of school, primarily at home.
- Opportunities and activities at home and in the community that support learning, reinforce and reward progress, are essential to academic achievement and development of life long learning.



If Parents are Involved, Students from All Communities Tend To:

- ✓ Earn higher grades and test scores
- ✓ Be promoted and earn credits
- ✓ Adapt well to school and attend regularly
- ✓ Have better social skills and behavior
- ✓ Enroll in higher-level programs
- ✓ Graduate and go on to higher education

(Beyond the Bake Sale)

Parents Are More Likely to Become Involved When:

- Parents understand that they **SHOULD** be involved
- Parents feel **CAPABLE** of making a contribution
- Parents feel **INVITED** by the school and their children

(Anne T. Henderson, Engaging Families to Zap the Gap)



NCLB Definition of Parent Involvement

NCLB defines parental involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring—

- That parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning.
- That parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school.
- That parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

(Developing Parent Involvement Policies)



School Policies Must Include:

- ✓ How the school will provide assistance to parents in understanding...local academic assessments and how to monitor a child's progress and work with teachers to improve the achievement of their child.
- ✓ A statement that a school-parent compact was jointly developed with parents and the compact outlines how parents, the entire school staff and students will share in the responsibility for improved student achievement.



MT Office of Public Instruction

OPI Learning Environment Correlate 5:

Student, Family, and Community Support

Families and the community are active partners in the educational process and work together with the school/district staff to promote programs and services for all students, based on high expectations and Montana Content and Performance Standards.



Assessing Your Attitudes...

Traditional Parent Involvement Myths:

- It is the school's job to determine how parents should be involved.
- Only hand-picked parents should be involved with the school.
- Most parents want to leave their children's education to the experts and don't want to intrude in school matters.
- Parents are interested primarily in their own children.



Assessing Your Attitudes...

Cultivating True Parent Leadership:

- Parents should be fully involved in deciding how to engage families.
- Every family has something important to contribute to children's learning.
- Most parents want to be actively engaged in their children's learning & to be consulted about school policies.
- Parents are concerned about the success of all children.



Make sure your school...

- ...is welcoming.
- ...reflects families' cultures.
- ...builds on families' cultural values.
- ...asks families about their expectations for their children.
- ...empowers parents and includes them in authentic decision-making.
- ...has courageous conversations.



Family Engagement Is...

- ✓ A shared responsibility
- ✓ Continuous
- ✓ Happens wherever children learn
- ✓ Promotes student achievement
- ✓ Essential for school improvement
- ✓ Cost effective



How Is Your Partnership With Parents?

- Answer the five questions individually.
- Use the Answer Grid to determine your points.


Use this self assessment to see where your school falls on the partnership path. Each letter is awarded a specific point from the Answer Grid that follows.

What is your school's attitude toward families?

- A.** Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support.
- B.** Parents are welcome when asked. There's only so much they can do.
- C.** Parents can be involved at school in a number of ways. It tries to make contact with all of them at least once a year.
- D.** Our school sets high standards for all students and families. It partners with families to make sure every single student succeeds

Does the school give families information about standards and the curriculum?

- A.** Parents don't need to know much about this, and they probably won't understand it anyway.
- B.** Parents get information about what students will be learning at the fall open house.
- C.** Teachers send home folders of student work.
- D.** Families help assess student portfolios, using scoring guides. They also attend regular exhibits of student work, where students explain how it meets standards.



Can parents and family members easily see the principal and visit classrooms?

- A.** Families should not bother school staff. Visiting the classroom distracts the children. Besides, parents will need security clearances before they are allowed in.
- B.** The school calls families if their children are having problems. Families can visit on report card pickup day.
- C.** The school has several family events every year. Parents help out as volunteers or tutors.
- D.** Parents are involved in all aspects of the school. They can attend staff training and the principal has regular hours each week to meet with families. Every school committee has active parent members.



Does the school have an active parent group, such as a PTA or Parent Association?

- A.** The principal has picked a small group of parents to help out.
- B.** The active parents are mostly middle class. The others don't come or contribute.
- C.** The parent group sets its own agenda and raises money for the school. They also write the school handbook.
- D.** Families decide how they want to be involved. They reach out to make sure all families take part in some way. Parents can use the phone, copier, fax machines and computers. The family center is always full of parents.

Does the school openly discuss tough issues, like achievement gaps, racism and bullying?

- A. The problems at our school are dealt with by its professional staff.
- B. The principal sets the agenda for discussions at staff meetings. Sometimes a few parents are invited.
- C. The school gives progress reports to parents, but the test data are hard to understand.
- D. Parents and teachers have study groups and do action research on issues like prejudice and tracking. Families are part of all major decisions.

Answer Grid

Give yourself the following points:

A= 1 point B= 2 points C= 3 points D= 4 points

Add up your points for a grand total.

Where is Your School?

Right now your school is a.....

5-7 points: Fortress School. Your school is trying to keep parents away rather than work with them.

8-11 points: Come If We Call School. Your school wants parents to be involved, but only on its terms.

12-15 points: Open-Door School. Your school welcomes families and supports their involvement in a number of ways.

16-20 points: Partnership School! Your school is willing and able to work with all families!



Fortress School (Below Basic)

- “Parents don’t care about their children’s education– they’re the reason the kids are failing”
- Parents shouldn’t “bother” school staff
- Principal picks a small group of “cooperative parents” to help out
- “We’re teachers, not social workers”
- Parents are afraid to complain
- “We’re doing all we can to reach families”



Come-if-we-call School (Basic)

- Parents are told at the fall open house what students will be learning
- Workshops are planned by staff
- Families visit school on report card pickup day
- Parents can call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework



Open-Door School (Proficient)

- Parent coordinator is available to help parents and answer questions
- School holds fun curriculum nights where students show their work
- Translators are available if necessary
- Parents can raise issues at PTA meetings or see the principal



Partnership School (Advanced)

- Home visits are made to every new family
- All family activities link to learning in class
- There is a clear, open process for resolving issues and problems
- Parents and teachers collaborate to boost achievement, close gaps
- Family resource center connects families to social services



Family Friendly Walkthroughs

This is a fantastic way to start an ongoing conversation about the “friendliness” of your school. The areas evaluated by the walkthrough team are:

- physical environment of the school.
- school-wide policies & practices.
- communication between school & home.



Guidelines for a Family Friendly Walkthrough:

- Assemble a team consisting of an equal number of parents and teachers, administration representatives, and community stakeholders.
- This team gathers to watch the DVD “What Does a Family-Friendly Partnership School Look Like?” The team should be oriented to the rubric.
- Each team member is provided with a rubric, a clipboard, and a pen/pencil. Each member scores each item during the walkthrough based on their perceptions only. All perceptions are correct.



Guidelines for a Family Friendly Walkthrough:

- It is important that the rubrics remain anonymous so that parents, administrators, and teachers feel safe about being honest throughout the walkthrough.
- After the walkthrough the team should hold a debriefing session and notes should be taken. The rubrics are gathered and information tabulated. Set another meeting with the team for a discussion and to formulate further steps.
- In 6-12 months a second walkthrough should be scheduled to determine if the original issues we addressed and to assist the school in moving forward.

(VT PIRC)



Three Core District-level Components Necessary for Systemic Family Engagement

- ✓ Fostering of district-wide strategies
- ✓ Building school capacity
- ✓ Reaching out to and engaging families

Programs that Foster Systemic Family Engagement

- ✓ Solid Foundation- builds school-wide approaches to foster SFC partnerships
- ✓ Parent Teacher Home Visit Project- reaches out to engage families
- ✓ Family Resource Center- builds school capacity

Another Way to Look at it:

The Joining Process

Welcome: Families are made to feel at home, comfortable, and a part of the school community.

Honor: Family members are respected, validated and affirmed for any type of involvement or contribution they make.

Connect: School staff and families put children at the center, and connect on education issues of common interest, designed to improve educational opportunities for the children.

(Iowa PIRC, *Parent Friendly Schools: Starting the Conversation*)



Resources and Best Practices

SOLID Foundation

Utilizing this research-based framework,
schools create an Action Plan in order to:

- assess current strengths & challenges.
- strengthen family-school connections.
- engage parents in children's learning.
- improve student academic & social learning.

<http://www.adi.org/solidfoundation/>

Parent Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP)



“Increasing the success of all students – one visit at a time”

This innovative model of family engagement results in:

- increased student attendance rates.
- increased student test scores.
- decreased suspension and expulsion rates.

<http://www.pthvp.org/>

Family Resource Centers

A Family Resource Center can be an anchor in a community and often deal with issues like:

- community unity.
- family and community health.
- welfare to work/employment.
- educational outcomes.

<http://www.wordinc.org/FRC/index.php>

Beyond the Bake Sale

The Essential Guide to Family- School Partnerships

Anne T. Henderson, Karen
L. Mapp, Vivian R.
Johnson and Don Davies

The New Press, 2007



Key Messages and Next Steps

- What resonates with you from this training?
- What might you try next year to make your school more Family Friendly?

Montana PIRC's Mission



Our mission is to bring parents, educators, and those working with families the information, training, and support to help children get ready for and succeed in school.